



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, September 27 – October 17, 2008

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

On September 15, Laudon collared a wolf north of Libby in the Seventeenmile drainage.

Boyd and Wilson attempted to capture and collar a member of the Pulpit Mountain in northwest Montana pack during the period, but were unsuccessful.

Asher had been working at the north end of the Crazies and south of Two Dot to scout for wolf activity based on public wolf reports. Traps were set and eventually pulled, but no wolves were captured.

Flights: Laudon flew on September 30. Lance flew packs on the E. Front on October 1.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On September 15, WS confirmed that a calf was killed by wolves in the Hog Heaven pack territory and that pack was strongly suspected to have been responsible. Because of previous depredations, FWP

authorized WS to collar and release a wolf to place an additional collar in the pack and to remove 1 wolf. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, a pup was collared and released and more intensive monitoring followed. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2 more calves were confirmed killed by wolves. A monitoring flight that day indicated that 5 adults and 5 pups were in the Hog Heaven pack. It was located near the depredation site and WS was then authorized to remove a total of 2 wolves which they did on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, another calf was confirmed killed by wolves. FWP authorized WS to remove 3 additional wolves for a total of 5 wolves removed in response to these cattle losses. WS killed 3 wolves on the 30<sup>th</sup> and control work is completed. A minimum of 5 wolves are left in the pack (at least 3 pups and 2 adults).

On September 30, WS confirmed one ewe and one goat killed by wolves on the same ranch north of Reed Point as confirmed sheep losses occurred previously. About 15 sheep have died in about 5 incidents on the same ranch in the last month. WS was asked to continue efforts to collar and release a wolf and to remove 1 wolf. A kill permit was also issued to the sheep producer. There are herders camping with both bands of sheep and guard dogs present. FWP has been scouting a larger area based on wolf reports east of Melville. WS, FWP, and area landowners north of Reed Point are still in close communication – no new damage has been reported and wolf activity has not been found on the ranch.

On October 1, WS investigated and confirmed a dead calf as being killed by wolves (Horn Mountain pack) on public land (Antelope Basin area) west of Reynolds Pass. Riders have been working in the area all summer with three different livestock owners who graze cattle on that allotment. FWP authorized WS to remove 1 wolf and a yearling female was killed on October 2. All cattle will be heading home and off the allotment within about 2 weeks.

On October 3, WS confirmed a goat was killed on private land NW of Helena. A single wolf was seen by the herder and 6 guard dogs chased the wolf away. This is the same ranch where a guard dog was killed earlier in the year and a wolf was seen. Efforts to collar what appears to be a new wolf pair with pups of the year were unsuccessful at that time. FWP asked WS to renew efforts to collar and release a wolf but cold/snowy weather hampered efforts. Efforts will pick up weather permitting.

On October 6, WS and FWP responded to a call about a dead calf on private land on the E. Front. A grizzly bear was initially suspected. Due to intermittent wolf reports in the area, wolf predation was also possible. The field investigation revealed a hole in the carcass consistent with an archery arrow. Although the carcass had been scavenged by grizzly and coyote, it was unconfirmed as a predation event by bears, coyotes, or wolves.

On October 8, FWP authorized the removal of the remaining 7 members of the Skalkaho pack due to escalating problems with cattle on private land southwest of Phillipsburg. There had been multiple incidents in September and FWP / WS had been implementing lethal control incrementally in addition to proactive non-lethal efforts by both the agencies and the landowner. However, on Oct 6<sup>th</sup>, cattle were again chased through 2 fences on the same ranch where earlier incidents occurred. Wolves remained in and around the cattle on private land during the last two weeks of September and the first few days of October and the landowner reported cattle continuing to be pushed around and acting agitated on multiple occasions. Also on Oct. 6, an adult cow was found dead and fed on by wolves in this same pasture. The cow was several days old and WS concluded it was a probable wolf kill. An extensive non-lethal effort to reduce conflicts has been implemented on this ranch. A range rider program has been in place for the last 2 years. And in the last several weeks the wolves have been hazed and harassed repeatedly with firearms. The wolves would leave when shots were fired and then return within the following 24 hours. There are at least 2 collared wolves from the now defunct

Sapphire pack that are still using the area and will not be included as part of this control action. As of Oct. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1 yearling male and 1 two-year old male wolf have been killed. Control work is ongoing.

On October 8, cattle had broken through a fence and were scattered on a Forest Service allotment east of Wisdom. FWP scouted the area and confirmed wolf tracks, but no signals from local area packs were heard. On October 9, WS confirmed wolves killed a cow on the allotment. The kill was suspected to have happened earlier in the week. A collar and release effort was initiated, but trapping efforts were delayed because of cold / snowy weather, lack of recent wolf activity, and heavy bear activity. The ranch manager reported that cattle had broken through another fence and wolf tracks were found. The cattle producer then moved his cows to private land closer to the highway and with fewer trees. Ranch employees also detected wolf activity on the private land not long after the cattle were moved there. On October 14, WS confirmed that wolves had killed two adult cows on the private ground. Wolf tracks have been seen area, but it is not currently known which wolves were involved. WS will renew efforts to collar and release a wolf and has also been authorized to kill 1 wolf. A shoot on sight permit was issued to the producer.

On October 9, WS confirmed wolves had injured a bull on public land in the Paradise Valley. It was discovered as cattle were being moved. Because cattle have been pulled off the allotment at the end of the grazing season, no lethal control was authorized. FWP, WS, and the area landowners will monitor for wolf activity on private lands.

On October 9, Wildlife Services confirmed a wolf or wolves had killed 3 ewes and injured a 4th on private land near Hall. It is unknown what wolves were involved in the recent attack. A depredation occurred on this same ranch in January 2008 and the Flint Creek pack was believed involved at that time, but this pack has never been collared and their current status is unknown. FWP has asked WS to try to trap and radio-collar a wolf on site.

On October 14, WS investigated a report of a dead 800-pound cow southwest of Denton. No evidence of predation by wolf, bear, coyote, or mountain lion was found. The cause of death is unknown.

On October 17, WS confirmed that wolves had killed 16 sheep on private land south of Grant (southwest Montana). Tracks indicated at least 2 wolves were involved. WS will attempt to collar and release a wolf as no known packs are in the area. FWP/WS also reviewed the 10j regulations with the producer.

### **Outreach and Education Activities**

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Sime attended the Granite Headwaters Watershed Group meeting. She gave an update on recent developments within the state's wolf program, local packs, the legal status of wolves and recent court-related actions. About 25 people attended.

### **Research Activities**

Nothing to Report.

### **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

On September 25, Laudon discovered 2 different wolf collars on mortality mode across the border in Canada. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, he investigated them. Kootenai North wolf 329's carcass was discovered ~ 15 miles north of the US/Canada border. Cause of death is unknown and is under investigation. A wolf that was collared in the East Fork Yaak drainage on the US side of the border 9/8/08 was found to be legally harvested in Canada ~ 12 miles north of the border.

## Other

### Wolf Litigation:

On Friday July 18, 2008, the U.S. Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana, issued a preliminary injunction that immediately reinstated temporary Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in the Northern Rockies. The Court found that: 1) Plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of their claim that the NRM gray wolf had not met its recovery criteria due to a lack of genetic exchange between the Greater Yellowstone Area (“GYA”) and the other northern Rocky Mountain populations; 2) Plaintiffs were likely to prevail on the merits of their claim that Wyoming's 2007 regulatory framework was an inadequate regulatory mechanism; and 3) immediate potential harm existed because of lax defense of property statutes and public hunts planned for Fall 2008.

On September 22, 2008, the federal government requested that the Court allow it to voluntarily withdraw its decision to delist wolves and re-evaluate information and make a new decision. The USFWS had concluded that this was the best and most timely way to resolve the issues flagged in the injunction ruling and on which the Court had indicated it was likely to rule against the federal government. USFWS asked to get the final rule back in its hands to closely review the Court's ruling, the final rule, the administrative record, any new information, and then consider whether modifications or some other action might be warranted. USFWS had also stated its intent to conduct further rulemaking – that is to consider any new information and possibly solicit public comment on any new information and revise its final decision.

On October 14, the court granted the request. In granting the request, the Court officially relisted wolves as endangered across northern Montana and experimental, non-essential across southern Montana under the federal Endangered Species Act. Wolves were also returned to the federally-listed status in Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Oregon, and Washington. The Court also dismissed the case without considering its merits, ending the lawsuit.

The USFWS is expected to gather new information, open another public comment period, and issue a revised decision, with efforts beginning in the last few months of 2008 and extending into 2009.

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:  
<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board will be holding their second meeting on October 24 in Room 152 of the State Capitol Building. The meeting starts at 10:00am and is scheduled to adjourn at 4:30. To listen to it from home through the internet, go to:  
[http://leg.mt.gov/css/Audio/audio\\_broadcast.asp](http://leg.mt.gov/css/Audio/audio_broadcast.asp)

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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